

Uncharted Territory

Having expertise in an industry doesn't always translate into an efficient business; planning, defining goals also are vital, says local expert



Marion and Mike Karpinski of Medifecta Healthcare Training found that having expertise in caregiving training wasn't all that was needed for running their business. They had to learn other business practices the hard way, by making mistakes and learning from them. Jim Craven 10/10/2007 Jim Craven

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Editor's note: This is the first installment in a periodic series on management issues and an RCC training course series for entrepreneurs that addresses those issues.

By Greg Stiles

Jumping into business ownership is a scary proposition for most people.

Even entrepreneurs with wonderful ideas, whose previous experience is working for someone else, can quickly find themselves with a notebook full of questions they might have asked before they started.

Mike and Marion Karpinski discovered their expertise about caregiving training didn't necessarily translate into running a company efficiently.

They started Medifecta Healthcare Training, a provider of educational resources for family caregivers and para-professionals in the form of DVD, video, curriculum-based training programs and books, in 1994.

"Mike and I had worked for other people, but we weren't necessarily business people," said Marion Karpinski, the company's president.

The realm of hiring people, developing policies and procedures, marketing and accounting were often uncharted territory.

"The things I take for granted now, how to hire slow and fire fast, were a new deal to me in 1995 through 1997," said Mike Karpinski. "You have to learn to document everything when you have an issue with an employee. You've got to keep it aboveboard and don't let emotions get involved. After being on the other side of the desk for so many years, it was a big wake-up."

It's important for business newcomers to define their objectives before launching an enterprise, said Linda Ballasy, a small business management instructor at Rogue Community College's Riverside Campus in Medford.

"What we're looking for are mission statements," Ballasy said. "Are they clear about the purpose? What do you want your business to accomplish? What part of the finances do you want to put into your pocket?"

Even at the start, exploring the endgame is important. Do entrepreneur's long-term goals consider growth, expansion and additional locations or the desire to sell the business or pass it on to the next generation?

"I'm a firm believer in planning," said Ballasy.

Accounting books and financial reports were another mystery to the Karpinskis in the early days of their business.

"Sometimes being able to ask the right questions is more important than having the answers," Mike Karpinski said.

"Even though the numbers were broken down by an accountant, we needed someone to go over it point by point. That provided a road map from where we've been and where we are today. That was one of those 'aha' moments when we were starting."

One way to arrive at those moments faster is for owners to evaluate themselves.

"A lot of times people know their business isn't quite where they want it," Ballasy said. "They don't understand each business is different. We give them an inventory list that's several pages long with lots of check boxes for them to see their strengths and weaknesses."

Ballasy teaches a nine monthly small business classes, running from 6:30-9:30 p.m. beginning Oct. 22 in Room D224 at RCC's Medford campus. The tuition for nine months is \$525. For more information, e-mail lbally@rogucecc.edu or telephone 541-499-2597.

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